

**TITLE: ESTABLISHMENT OF SITES OF CONSCIENCE IN NORTH  
EASTERN NIGERIA: CONCEPT NOTE FOR A POST CONFLICT  
ROLES FOR MUSEUMS IN NIGERIA.**

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## **Introduction**

“The need to remember often times competes with the equally compelling desire to forget.”

Attempts to forget deeply horrific events even with its noble intentions tend to have the unintended effect of obscuring the upcoming generations from learning critical lessons and destroy opportunities to build a peaceful and prosperous future. It is therefore a useful enterprise to evolve post crisis engagements through designing, establishing and implementing post conflict projects and programs that can recapture and represent the story that can refresh the memory about the trajectory of actions man that has led to dire consequences.

A Site of Conscience is a place of memory – such as a historic site, place-based museum or memorial site or event centre that documents and represents memory of tragic events in order to prevent the erasure from memory and to ensure a more just and humane future. Sites of Conscience provide safe spaces to preserve and remember even the most traumatic memories of events, episodes and historical phenomena. It is a forum that collects and preserves artifacts and other tangible materials associated with events as well as places and spaces that reflect or represents the story and narratives of human tragedy. Such establishments provide opportunities for affected communities to organize themselves around the memory of hardship and pains to make connections between the past and related contemporary human rights issues. By documenting and preserving memories of the past tragic events, we can question current realities and dare to create meaningful change for better future. Sites of Conscience are therefore memorials of deep human significance, to suffering and struggle, tragedy and triumph. But they don't just teach us about the past but through seeing the folly and pitfalls from

the past, they transform us by highlighting new roles we must assume to fill in vacuums of responsibility and guarantee safe future thus they help us see our shared goals and our shared responsibilities.

## **JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PROJECT CONCEPT**

In Nigeria, the insurgency of Boko Haram which started in the North Eastern region has generated an unprecedented series of violence leading to massive loss of lives and properties with disruptions of socio-economic and cultural activities for nearly a decade now. The consequences of this phenomenon is still being studied and documented, suffice it to say that beside the civil war of 1967-70, nothing in contemporary times has inflicted such a massive scale of calamity on the nation as reflected on the impacts it had on politics, polity and society; growth, economy and development; culture, society and psychology; environment, landscape and migration. In short, the consequences of the impact of Boko haram, especially on the North eastern region of the country, is a major theme that will continue to be a strong subject of study in the political, socio-cultural, religious and economic history of the region,

The fact that major crisis events and situations in the history of Nigeria has not been captured in material documentation format, leaves a very wide vacuum of historical resource evidence for instruction and learning. Beside the National War Museum in Umuahia, there is no any existing documentation of tangible material evidence of crisis or tragic events organized and presented for public understanding and enlightenment in this country. The Maitatsine religious crisis in Kano and its up shoots in Yola and Maiduguri which bear relationship to the Boko Haram insurgency has not enjoyed any demonstrable historical documentation of collections and preservation of the tangible material evidences

and data concerning the period and the events. It is therefore very important to put conscious efforts towards collecting, documenting, preserving and exhibiting material evidences of these historic events for the purpose of study, understanding and reflection.

The theories of reconciliation and therapy will be the framework for this study which has three basic objectives:

- a) To examine the relevance of this concept as a worthy post conflict alternative platform for truth, justice and reconciliation.
- b) To explore relevant stake holders for partnership and collaboration and integrate the concept into the discourse and strategy of the post conflict recovery efforts of the North East.
- c) Provide a veritable platform to serve as memorial centers where lessons on the tragic consequences of illiteracy, intolerance and extremism will be demonstrated as guide for the future. The Site will also serve as an avenue for public engagements and dialogues on human rights and gender issues; multiculturalism and tolerance; illiteracy and youth empowerment.

## **SITE OF CONSCIENCE**

Sites of conscience are establishment concepts designed for the memory of victims of tragic events caused by human conflicts. It can be a historic site, place-based museum or memorials that provide safe spaces to remember and preserve traumatic memories and enable visitors to make connections between the past and related contemporary human rights issues.

Today, the establishment of sites of conscience serves as organizations with a mission working towards inclusive, just and peaceful societies in which the

dignity of people harmed by gross violation of human rights are restored through sustained advocacy for social justice and human rights. It provides platforms for documentation of tangible and intangible materials associated with the events that will facilitate genuine and authentic community narratives, social reconciliation and economic reintegration of victims and survivors. It may recall sad events and situations but it promotes the development of a learning process to communities in coming to grip with the realities that shaped their conditions. Through the process of transparent engagements, these platforms can provide avenues for the improvement of wellness and wellbeing as well as cater for psycho-social, socio-economic and paralegal services. Some of the examples of programs and projects developed around the world include the following case studies:-

- After the civil war in Sri Lanka (1983-2009) Mothers from different sides are sharing their stories in community workshops that employ holistic, integrated, and multidisciplinary approaches to address issues of truth, justice and reconciliation.
- In the United States of America, Youths from every region are using the platform of sites of conscience to re-echo the history of the civil rights movement and amplify their voices in the fight to make educational opportunities more equitable.
- In Northern Ireland, Police officers from both sides of the conflict are telling their stories in an oral history project designed to foster trust and understanding among the two factions who fought each other in the past.

## SOME EXAMPLES OF SITES OF CONSCIENCE ESTABLISHED AROUND THE WORLD

Throughout the world, the desire to keep up the memories of tragic events in human history is profound and kept alive by the success of the numerous examples of memorial sites dedicated to various forms of human rights abuses and other forms of violence. Some of the sites established in Africa include the following:-

- The Kigali Genocide Memorial opened on the 10th Anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, in April 2004. The Memorial is built on a site where over 250,000 people are buried. These graves became clear reminder of the cost of intolerance, ignorance and hatred. It is a permanent memorial to those who fell victim to the genocide and serves as a place for people to grieve those they lost. The memorial includes three permanent exhibitions, the largest of which documents the genocide in 1994. There is also a children's memorial, and an exhibition on the history of genocidal violence around the world. The Education Centre, Memorial Gardens and National Documentation Centre of the Genocide all contribute to a meaningful tribute to those who perished and form a powerful educational tool for the next generation. <https://www.kgm.rw>
- South Africa has a number of centers dedicated to the tragic history of inhuman rule of the apartheid era. They comprised of different establishments ranging from the **Apartheid museum**: Presents a century of South African history, from industrialization at the turn of the last century to the transition to democracy in 1994 and beyond. <https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/>, **The Constitution Court**: An Old Fort prison in Johannesburg as the site for the new Constitutional Court building. The prison complex, which once symbolized the worst of the old apartheid regime that held Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, would now be

viewed worldwide as a beacon of hope. Constitution Hill now includes a museum interpreting the history of the prison and issues of justice past and present, public spaces for dialogue, and the Court building itself. <https://www.constitutionhill.org.za> **Khulumani center:** Founded in 1995 by women survivors of apartheid gross human rights violations when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa was being debated in Parliament without input from or consultation with victims and survivors. Khulumani did major outreach to communities to alert them about the coming TRC processes with its promises of redress for the political crimes of the past. Khulumani developed community-based, victim-driven processes of transitional justice towards restoring the dignity and decency of all who had been harmed by the crimes of the past. <http://www.khulumani.net> **Robben Island:** Is an island in Table Bay, 6.9 kilometers west of the coast of Bloubergstrand, Cape Town, South Africa. The late and former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on this Island for 18 of the 27 years he served behind bars before the fall of apartheid. To date, three former inmates of Robben Island have gone on to become Presidents of South Africa: Nelson Mandela, Kgalema Motlanthe, and Jacob Zuma. It became a World heritage Site in 1999.

- **Gorée Island** in Senegal on the Atlantic Ocean shares the history and narratives of the vast transatlantic slave trade. Built around 1776 the red house on the Atlantic became a museum in 1962 and the first UNESCO World Heritage site in Africa in 1978. This “memory island” is the symbol of the slave trade on an island reputed to be the largest slave trading center on the African coast. With its cortege of suffering, tears and death, Goree Island symbolizes the painful memories of the Atlantic slave trade which are crystallized in this small island of 28 hectares lying 3.5 km off the coast from Dakar. The historic site has welcomed

thousands of visitors around the world including Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II and Barack Obama.

- In **Liberia the SAMAY Memorial** is a 10' x 10' x 3' cement cross with inscription of the names of the 37 lost community members inscribed on it. In the middle of the cross is a memorial text that reads: "In loving memory of our late fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters who died as a result of the Liberian civil crisis." The memorial is used as a tool to teach children in primary and secondary schools about the war with the view to passing on non-adversarial approaches to resolving conflict. The memorial was erected in 2001 by members of the community as a direct response to the phenomenon of a recurrent spell of dreams by community members. In these dreams some of the dead killed in the massacre appeared and asked not to be forgotten.

<https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/membership/samay-development-organization-liberia/>

- In Sierra Leone thousands of rural school children are being educated through a traveling exhibit about the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) which took the lives of 70,000 people, but which many adults are hesitant to discuss because they fear opening old wounds.

<https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/2016/02/revitalization-of-la-maison-des-esclaves/>

- In Nigeria the national War Museum in Umuahia put up an exhibition of the Nigerian civil war with a display of materials associated with the 1967-1970 civil wars during which an estimated number of 3 million people died. Although the exhibition contains display of ethnographic and cultural materials, the story of the civil war and its consequences are the profound theme of the exhibition. **The slave**



**museum** in Calabar Cross River State and Badagry Lagos are also good examples of the memorial discourse of the slave trade era with graphic illustrations of the nature and process of the trans-atlantic slave trade that dehumanized and inflicted pains, suffering and agony on millions of black slaves carried across the atlantic ocean.

- Holocaust memorials and museums are the most widespread establishment dedicated to the memory of victims of genocide mainly of Jewish origin which characterized the period 1933-45. There are dozens of museums and memorial sites in Europe and America that are dedicated to the memory of Jews who suffered persecution and genocide in the hands of the Nazi Germany and their collaborators over the years. Even though such centers and memorial sites are supposed to highlight the inhuman treatment meted against a particular people due to racial hatred and intolerance, the Jewish state of Israel today continues to perpetrate the same unjust treatment on the Arabs whom they forcefully took over their lands.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SITES OF CONSCIENCE IN THE NORTH-EAST**

After the devastating effects of Boko Haram insurgency in the NE region and with the suppression of its heinous activities in areas where it once held sway, and now that the end of Boko haram is hopefully in sight, it is pertinent to come up with an effective framework of action for the establishment of places of memory to serve as platforms for action around critical issues that led to the past turmoil and sufferings. At the heart of the concept proposal is the establishment of creative and pioneering projects that bring people together to learn and talk more openly about the past and how to avoid the pitfalls that can lead to such disastrous situations for a virile, more peaceful and just future. The concept should address key issues such

as discrimination, extremism, intolerance, xenophobia, etc. and develop programs and activities geared towards addressing objective living conditions of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment.

## **DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SITES OF CONSCIENCE IN THE NORTH-EAST.**

The action plan to be developed for the establishment of sites of conscience will be based on the following key objectives:

- I. To create a platform for the collection and preservation of the memories of Boko haram insurgency in the North east to serve as memorial and resource center for the understanding of the causes and impact of insurgency
- II. To establish permanent media dedicated to the discourse and conversation around xenophobia, extremism, intolerance and other tendencies that give rise to human right abuses.
- III. To provide catalyst for youth empowerment through training opportunities, job creation and project development.

### **a) Crystallization of ideas and concept development**

This should involve relevant government agencies, private and public institutions including NGOs developing an action plan and sharing of responsibility. Multiple of objectives may characterize the stage and management approaches to cultural resources. This may involve a wide array of institutional and organizational frameworks and outlooks with various background knowledge, experience and values. These factors often work in a complex mesh. Overcoming these challenges is therefore vital in the establishment of the site

## **b) Designations and establishment of sites of conscience**

The focus here will be the inventorisation of the theatre of conflict and documentation of relevant sites as well as the design of appropriate monument and memorabilia. This will be followed by identification of relevant stakeholders for community involvement and participation.

Achieving broad participation and ensuring visibility of all stakeholders and their full engagement is necessary to address the complex nature of the sites. Local community involvement will ensure a power balance between stakeholders or political and Socio-economic factors in the wider environment. Thus, will make clear understanding as to who participates in decision making, assessments, planning, implementations and evaluation process and how.

## **c) Data and material collections and sensation campaigns**

Objects that range in date from the beginning of the history of Islam in Borno and environs right up to the period of the conflict need to be collected. The objects have to cover the whole conflict areas as far as possible equally. They should address as many aspects of the conflict experiences as proved practicable and tell a story about whole societies not just the rich and powerful within them. The objects would therefore necessarily include humble things of everyday life as well as great works of art used in the conflict or affected by the conflict.

## **d) Developing and monitoring the exhibition around the subject matter**

The exhibition will fundamentally focus on the conflict. It will travel back in time and across pre-colonial environment of the NE and see how the people have interacted across religious and cultural backgrounds to shape their world they inherited and bequeathed their generations. The collections and exhibitions will

trace the story of the conflict by examining associated conflicts with religious colorations such as the Maitatsine and its different stands. Other factors in the of interfaith conflict and coexistence will also be of interest for the project including the growing strength of Christian evangelism and miracle centres. By deciphering the messages which objects communicate about people and places, environments and interactions as they afford opportunity to reflect on the genesis and the consequences of the conflict. The stories and programs that will emerge should be able to enlighten peoples minds about the manipulations and religious beliefs and dogmas by conmen to advance their selfish interest while pitting poor people against themselves. It is hoped that visitors and all stake holders who engage in the project and programs will not only comprehend what happened before and after the conflict but will be moved to action to prevent a reoccurrence.

#### **e) Development of programmes and projects**

Development of programmes beyond the physical confine of the site should be aimed at providing space for interaction and relief, for reconciliation and healing. Programmes should be designed to restore the self-identity of the victims in such a way as to allow them to identify and confront their fears and pains by expressing their emotions. Other programmes should target the process of re-humanization, deradicalization and reconciliation of and with the perpetrators.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although 'turning the page' may appear to be an attractive epitaph to a tragic experience, the need to learn and draw lesson from the past requires the preservation of the past. For the North East of Nigeria recent experience may involve creating a safe memorial space on the ashes of Boko Haram insurgency that will document and preserve the history and impact of the violence and the plight of its victims. A program of action has to commence now by individuals, groups and agencies who feel a sense of duty to save the future generations from falling into such unnecessary tragedy of trauma and turmoil. The National commission for museums and Monuments as the agency responsible for preservation and protection of Nigerians heritage may lead the initiative but the backbone of its dynamism and sustenance must come from the involvement of multiple agencies both public and private.